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NRCS Joins Blue Crab Aquaculture Consortium

OCEAN SPRINGS, Oct. 22, 2012 – With the help of USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and partners, the blue crab is poised to be the next farm-raised seafood in the state.

NRCS is joining with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, University of Southern Mississippi and Alcorn State University to form the Mississippi Blue Crab Aquaculture Consortium, which is working to expand the existing knowledge and technology in raising blue crabs. Mississippi is home to one of the nation’s two blue crab hatcheries, making the state a perfect place to increase this knowledge. The four groups signed a memorandum of understanding today.

USM’s Gulf Coast Research Lab became part of a multi-state blue crab consortium in 2002, providing groundbreaking progress in understanding basic blue crab biology and in developing blue crab larval culture techniques. Now, this new Consortium is building upon that foundation.

The Consortium will focus on ways to raise crabs, including until they shed their shell, becoming a soft-shell crab, a popular food. Right now, many soft-shell crabs are imported from Asia, and if farmers could raise soft-shell crabs locally, it could become a viable industry. The Consortium wants to provide outreach and technical assistance to farmers wanting to hatch, raise and harvest soft-shell crabs.

NRCS will provide conservation technical assistance, helping landowners know if their soil is appropriate for building a pond to raise crabs. “We see blue crabs as an economic opportunity for farmers wanting to get involved in aquaculture,” Area Conservationist Wesley Kerr said. “This will ensure the seafood that we eat in restaurants or buy at markets is locally-grown and fresh.”

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